

QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE, RE: NEWSPAPER REPORTS OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATURE.

MR. M. R. NARAYANA PILLAI: Before commencing the next item in the agenda, with your permission, Sir, I want to raise a question of privilege. The official version of a portion of the proceedings of this House dated the 24th July 1943 states as follows:

"PRESIDENT: My point is this. I know that the honourable member takes great trouble to study these questions, and I am anxious to give him the utmost latitude. But there are certain courtesies of debate that should be preserved and I am so jealous, so solicitous, of the level of the debate here that nothing that is unmeaningly or maliciously censorious should be allowed. My sole idea is that a member who has got the promise of a good debater should not descend to the level of making unworthy insinuations when he can do so much better."

There is a version of this in the Malayala Rajyam of yesterday and it reads:

പ്രസിഡണ്ട്: എനിക്കു പറയുവാനുള്ളത് ഇതാണ്. ഈ പ്രശ്നങ്ങൾ പഠിക്കുവാൻ വെളുമാനപ്പെട്ട മെമ്പർ വളരെ യത്നിക്കുന്നുണ്ടെന്നു എനിക്കറിയാം. പരമാവധി സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യം അനുവദിക്കുവാൻ എനിക്കു താല്പര്യമുണ്ട്. എന്നാൽ പാലിക്കേണ്ടതായി ചില വാദപ്രതിവാദമന്ത്രികൾ ഉണ്ട്. ഈ സഭയിലെ വാദപ്രതിവാദങ്ങളിൽ നിരത്ഥകവും ഭർദ്ദേശപരവുമായ ആരോപണങ്ങൾ കടന്നുകൂടരുതെന്നു എനിക്കു നിർബന്ധമുണ്ട്. നല്ല വാദപ്രതിവാദസമത്വമായിത്തീരുന്നതിന്നു കഴിവുള്ള ഒരു മെമ്പർ യോഗ്യർല്ലാത്ത വ്യാഗ്രപ്രയോഗങ്ങളിലേക്കു ഇറങ്ങരുതെന്നു മാത്രമാണു എന്റെ ആശയം.

In the Kaumudi that came out last evening — Kaumudi is a daily paper and it is one of the most important papers in Travancore issued in Trivandrum — there is a very long version and what appears there does not conform to the official version. This is the version.

"... .. അർത്ഥരഹിതമായും ഭർദ്ദേശപരമായുമുള്ള ആരോപണങ്ങളിലേക്കു അധഃപതിക്കാതെ അന്തസ്സായി സഭയിലെ വാദപ്രതിവാദങ്ങൾ നടക്കണമെന്നുള്ള കാര്യത്താലും എനിക്കു പ്രത്യേകമായി താല്പര്യം നിർബന്ധമുണ്ട്."

Then further on in the same para in Kaumudi I find

"..... തനിക്കു സമത്വമായി കാര്യനിർവഹണം നടത്താനുള്ള സന്ദർഭവും സൗകര്യവും ഉള്ളപ്പോൾ ഭംഗികെട്ട വക്ത്രാകതി പ്രയോഗങ്ങൾകൊണ്ടു കൈകാര്യം ചെയ്യുന്ന താഴ്ന്നനിലയിലേക്കു ഇടിഞ്ഞിറങ്ങരുതെന്നു എനിക്കു പറയുവാനുള്ളു."

In this connection I just want to make a humble statement also to you, Sir, and that is exaggerations and omissions are perhaps tolerable, but wilful and deliberate defamation in the course of reporting should be checked in this country, a country where the percentage of higher education is so high. The public are really anxious to know what the honourable members, their representatives, do in the House.

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Publication of reports falsely and irresponsibly must be condemned. Publishing an untrue version of the proceedings is one thing, and criticizing a member on his speech is another. As one who has had an illustrious career as a leading non-official both in the Province and at the Centre, I appeal to your high sense of the dignity of the House and to your sense of justice that you will be kind enough at least to direct the paper to publish my complaint made on the floor of this House against their reporting. I mention this here because insults by way of publishing such wrong versions of proceedings is offending the privilege of the House.

MR. S. NARAYANA PILLAI (*Quilon cum Kottarakara*): May I know the document from which the honourable member is reading?

MR. M. R. NARAYANA PILLAI: It is from a hand-written note prepared by Mr. M. R. Narayana Pillai. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT: The honourable member was perfectly within his rights in bringing to the notice of the Chair any infringement of what may be regarded as the accuracy of reporting of the debates in this House. As is very well known, according to the history of the House of Commons, no reporter was allowed to take any note of the proceedings of the House of Commons, or the House of Lords, and during the last 700 years any report that is taken down is only by means of concession or courtesy. That is why when any member of the House of Commons, or a member of the peerage does not want anybody to hear him, the moment that is stated, all the Press and visitors are cleared out.

The position is this. Newspapers have, as in the case of Judicial proceedings in Courts, got certain rights and obligations in regard to the reporting of the proceedings of the Legislature. I am glad that this opportunity has been afforded so that I may make the position clear. Just as in the case of reporting the proceedings of a court, they must either report it completely accurately or take the fullest responsibility for such compression as is undertaken, being in conformity with the spirit of the original. So likewise in the matter of reporting the proceedings of the Legislature of a country, the newspapers have a special responsibility to discharge, namely, that they should, as far as possible, report *in extenso* and accurately or if they compress, it should be done in order to convey the spirit of the debate and the remarks made in the course of the debate.

I have heard the passages read out by the honourable member, and I think the editor of the "Kerala Kaumudi" has not really adhered to the spirit of the debate. As this is not fully realised in this country as distinguished from western nations, I am only issuing this instruction to all editors of newspapers and reporters that in the reporting of the proceedings of the Legislature the report should be either verbatim or *in extenso* or if they compress them, it must be so compressed as to bring in the exact spirit of the original. Having said that, I hope honourable members of this House will realise that the ends of justice have been met.